

VZCZCXRO1239
OO RUEHDA
DE RUEHAK #1014/01 1201420
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 301420Z APR 07
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1899
RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC//PA
RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU
INFO RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 8023
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 2597
RUEHDA/AMCONSUL ADANA 1897
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 5885
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 5652
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2263
RUEUITH/DET 1 39LG ANKARA TU
RHMFIUU/USDOCO 6ATAF IZMIR TU
RHMFIUU/39OS INCIRLIK AB TU
RHMFIUU/AFOSI DET 523 IZMIR TU
RHMFIUU/39ABG INCIRLIK AB TU
RHMFIUU/AFOSI DET 522 INCIRLIK AB TU
RUEUITH/AFLO ANKARA TU

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 001014

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EUR/SE, EUR/PD, NEA/PD, DRL
JCS PASS J-5/CDR S. WRIGHT

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
MONDAY, APRIL 30, 2007

In Today's Papers

Mass Rally for Secularism in Turkey

All papers report as many as one million people rallied in Caglayan Square in Istanbul on Sunday, denouncing the Islamist aspirations of the ruling AKP government, demanding it withdraw its presidential candidate Abdullah Gul. The rally was organized by women and was backed by over 600 NGOs, attracting people from all over the country and abroad. The protestors, carrying Turkish flags and posters of Ataturk, shouted such slogans as "Turkey is secular and will remain secular" and "Neither Shariah nor military coup -- we want a democratic Turkey." The crowd also called on the parties on the left and right to unite. The number of participants given by officials, organizers and press vary from 180,000 to 1.2 million. The Istanbul rally follows a similar demonstration in Ankara on April 14 which drew, according to some estimates, up to 1.5 million people.

Most mainstream and liberal dailies say in full front page coverage the Turkish people "raised their voices," adding all "must notice the clear message from the march that the solution is not a coup but elections." Intellectual Islamist-oriented Zaman downplayed the march with a half-page reporting on inside pages. Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak highlights that the demonstrators stood against a coup in an extensive report under the headline "Democracy is a Beautiful Thing." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet says "the millions in support of a secular democratic Turkish Republic" gave the government "the biggest warning." Mainstream dailies Hurriyet and Vatan say "women weighed in" at the rally, claiming about half of the protestors were women who came to Istanbul from all over the country. Replying to a question on the demonstration, Deputy Prime Minister Abdullatif Sener said it was a democratic right, and their demands should be heeded.

Turkish Military Threatens to Oust Government

All papers: The Turkish General Staff (TGS) posted on its webpage an unusually strong statement on Friday night, hours after an inconclusive first round of voting in parliament on Abdullah Gul's

nomination as president, with a threat to intervene in the election.

The statement reminded the government that it was watching "with concern" developments that were threatening secularism, underlining that "the Turkish armed forces takes sides in these debates and is the absolute defender of secularism. When necessary they will display their attitudes and actions very clearly." The statement also described attempts to organize "alternative" Islamic celebrations to national festivals as "an open challenge against the state," claiming the organizers were hiding their true intentions under the guise of religion. It indicated the AKP should drop plans to take the presidency, or the military will step in.

On Saturday, the ruling AKP government sharply criticized the army threat, with Government spokesman Cemil Cicek saying the military was answerable to the civilian authorities. Cicek added the statement would be perceived as influencing the Constitutional Court amid a legal challenge to the government's conduct of the presidential election. Deputy Prime Minister Abdullatif Sener said on Sunday general elections can be held after the presidential election, in around August, stressing the AKP candidate Abdullah Gul won't be withdrawn.

EU enlargement commissioner Olli Rehn called on the military to "leave the remit of democracy to the democratically elected government." "This is a test case to see if the Turkish armed forces respect democratic secularism and the democratic arrangement of civil-military relations," said Rehn in a statement over the weekend. Sunday papers quoted Assistant Secretary of State Dan Fried as saying, "We hope and expect that the Turks will work out these political issues in their own way, in a way that's consistent with their secular democracy and constitutional provisions." "I don't see that Turkey is about to revert to a previous condition

ANKARA 00001014 002 OF 003

from the 1970s and the 80s. Turkish democracy has deepened a great deal in the last few years," Fried was quoted as saying.

Economic-political daily Referans expects Turkish markets to destabilize heavily if AKP insists on electing a president before holding early elections. Foreign investors, controlling 70 percent of Turkish stock exchange, might leave Turkey if the presidential process moves forward, warns Referans.

Editorial Commentary on Turkish Military Warning
Washington-based Ali Aslan writes in the intellectual Islamist-oriented Zaman: "Washington first reacted to the military warning by expressing support for 'the democratic process.' Shortly after that it felt the need to revise this line with 'the US fully supports the Constitutional process of Turkey's secular democracy.' Apparently, the US official view on this issue was crafted after hearing different comments from different branches. In other words, the State Department's initial reaction favoring democracy was balanced in a way not to disturb the military too much. The majority of the US expectations from Turkey are of a military nature, thus angering the Turkish military was considered to be a bad thing. Maybe the US did not want to be seen as interfering in Turkey's affairs either. In any case, the US should have been clearer about democracy at such a critical time."

Sukru Kucuksahin observes in the mainstream daily Hurriyet: "There is no way to feel empathy for supporters of the military warning or those who plan to use this as an internal political tool in the upcoming elections. While the Constitutional Court process is expected to speed up the election decision, and while the people demonstrated their democratic demands in the largest rally in the country's history, the Turkish army warning remains unacceptable and unnecessary. The ruling AKP, on the other hand, continues to do unacceptable things as well. The AKP enjoyed the democratic process so far but it was like a one-way street. The party achieved a two-thirds majority in parliament with 34 percent of the popular vote, and during the last 4 years ignored the remaining 66 percent on every occasion. More important than the military warning, the recent popular rallies in Ankara and Istanbul are giving a clear message: elections. Following yesterday's rally, I am sure that the AKP board members are wishing the Constitutional Court rules against them so that elections becomes a de facto reality."

Taha Akyol comments in the mainstream daily Milliyet: "The government took a dignified stance against the military warning which indicates the strength of Turkish democracy. But the government should also take steps toward eliminating worries and tension in society. The AKP should open itself to the center and isolate the marginal voices. From a political point of view, the government can wait for the Constitutional Court decision regarding the presidential election. However, real politics call for an immediate general election regardless of the Court's ruling. FM Gul is certainly a viable figure for the presidency, but he will have to go through that process after the general elections."

Turkish Constitutional Court to Rule on Presidential Election
All papers: On May 2, the Turkish Parliament is due to hold a second round of voting on Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul's nomination as Turkey's new president. After the first round of voting last week, the main opposition party CHP has asked the Constitutional Court to rule the presidential election invalid. The court said it will try to announce its decision before Wednesday's vote. If the court annuls the presidential procedure, early parliamentary elections must be called. Outgoing President Sezer will remain in office until a new parliament chooses his successor. If the court backs the government, Gul is expected to win in the third round on May 9, when he needs just a simple majority of 276 votes. "The presidential election process has begun and will continue. There can be no question of my withdrawing my candidacy," Gul told the press Sunday.

ANKARA 00001014 003 OF 003

Turkey's influential business group TUSIAD called in a statement on Sunday for early parliamentary elections "to preserve the inseparable principles of democracy and secularism." TUSIAD also criticized the military's threat to intervene in the presidential election. Prime Minister Erdogan will address the nation on Monday at 8.15 pm local time amid the crisis that has pitted the military and secularists against his AKP government.

Sezer Hosts Karzai-Musharraf Meeting
Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Yeni Safak and others report outgoing President Sezer hosted a meeting on Sunday between Afghani President Hamid Karzai and Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf in Ankara. Prime Minister Erdogan and Foreign Minister Gul joined the meeting of the two presidents who are in Turkey for two days to discuss border security and terrorism.

TV News:
(NTV, 8 A.M.)

Domestic News

- Two Turkish soldiers killed in clashes with the PKK in southeast Turkey were laid to rest in their hometowns Mardin and Konya.
- The cousin of CHP MP for Hakkari Esat Canan has been found dead in his hotel room in the southeastern city of Hakkari.
- Consultants to Turkish Central Bank say the real unemployment rate in Turkey is 16.9 percent.

International News

- President Ahmadinejad called Iraqi Prime Minister al-Maliki to confirm Iran will participate in the expanded meeting of Iraq's neighbors to be held in Egypt. Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki will participate in the talks May 3-4 in Sharm al-Sheikh.
- Turkish Cypriot "Foreign Minister" Turgay Avci has offered to hold talks with his Greek Cypriot counterpart George Lillikas in a third country.
- A suicide car bomber killed 60 people and wounded 170 in Karbala, near a revered Shiite Muslim shrine on Saturday.
- About 200 Iraqis celebrated Saddam Hussein's birthday in his

hometown of Tikrit over the weekend.

WILSON